SYNOPSIS OF THE DISSERTATION FOR PRE-SUBMISSION SEMINAR

NAME OF CANDIDATE: PAROMITA DATTA

NAME OF SUPERVISOR: DR. SHANTA DUTTA

DATE OF SUBMISSION OF SYNOPSIS: AUGUST 20TH, 2024.

REGISTRATION NUMBER: R - 14RS03210069

Modernity and the Body: Representative South-Asian Women Poets since 1947

My work attempts to look at the South Asian poets in the post 1950s to the present, who leave behind traces of an "otherness" that enables the postulation of ideas and recurrent trends in their poetic sensibilities in a dialectics of politics directing its focus on and around the female body. The latter, has, among prevalent socio-political, economic, psychological, and cultural conditions, invited curiosity and simultaneously appeared as a site for violence, confinement, stigmas and other ambivalences that conveniently situate alterity in paradigms of patriarchy. Often relegated as a space for gendered experiences along with experiments frequently governed by patriarchal supremacy, it continues to afford inspiration and imagination for art and artists who have explored its hidden possibilities both in the traditional conventions and modernist perspectives. Digital humanities, video gaming for instance have not been heedless to the infinite scopes associated with the female body that may lend novelty in contemplation and execution of advanced scientific knowhow in the broader areas of gender, sex, sexuality, beauty and pageantry, among others. Latest mediascapes accommodated the seismic shifts affecting femininity and its corresponding "bodies" to account for the expansive growth of distinctive responses recounted in virtual phenomena. While the majority of takers on such issues are more or less located in the nuances of western and white Eurocentricism, parallel and intersecting notions coexist in the non-Eurocentric discourses. Observing texts that often involve controversies within their own specific quarter of existence, diversifications seem to be projected in apparent uniformity of thought or design. Through the lens of such creative genius thinkers, femininity is reconstructed in postcolonial dialogues of exchanges that embody the phases of transition in eastern or southern margins of the globe. It need not be reiterated that such revisionist claims do not emerge from or rely upon peaceful, polite and sophisticated urbanist principles developed against certain fixed agenda

and memoranda for its explication. On the contrary, the ideologies and principles, obvious by-products of struggles that may be racist, gendered, theological, political or philosophical, range from conflicts at the micro to the macro, extensive and beyond societies, cultural borders or geopolitical territories. Transcending spaces to assume transnational importance, cultural relativism is more than apparent in the assimilation of feminist philosophy inclusive of the most informal content available across resources.

Voicing the women's needs and their consistent efforts to make their demands heard and known, the grossness of inequalities explained and examined, challenging the accustomed march towards patriarchy's definitive goals, their bod(ies) symbolise dominant and powerful mechanisms seeking to be evinced in a system that refutes the woman without logic or argument. Optimising modes and manners practised and perfected over time, a continuum of ever-growing differences has allegedly led society to frame its opinions in a garb of biased preconceptions. While observing the multiple divergences offered by the invigorating dynamism of feminist thought and expression, masculinist attitudes negate the otherness manifested by time, remaining partially if not deliberately oblivious to the change in fear that its own solidarity might be at stake. The body of the woman operates as a reference for multiple evidences to interrogate both visible and invisible marks of the transition, or the more prominent (read "permanent") imprints of stigmas and punishments, enforced customs of specific communities reliant on unique beliefs and even dubbed a site for containment of disabilities and deformities. Literally as also metaphorically, the resultant factors of force, violence, torture (acid attacks, etc) or disease or surgery surface the enigma of womanhood. Accordingly, the body's regulatory behaviour is noted with caution in a masculinist angle. Deviant attitudes are labelled "offensive" and "criminal", compelled to bear the amplification of the "sinful" in the event of staunch bigotry lurking behind. Honour killings, exiles, imprisonments, arrests, threats, rapes, abuses, however, represent a minor fraction of tools

employed by those empowered to continue to revive coercive measures against the body within the familiar societal structure.

Marginalization of womanhood, sisterhood or motherhood are common phenomena in the circumstances that fail to prevent or undo the severities encountered by women. Damaged and doomed, the alterity of their bodies offers a precarious position. Encircled by the norms and normative behaviours, poets and creative thinkers therefore contend adopting to means and methods that may pave way for escape from the entrapment to which generations of women fall prey. Yet, in several instances these snares are unavoidable, signifying precincts of earliest principles of repression. The weight of customs and beliefs often customized specially for women's bodies to observe and obey, underscores the violations against the other in clarified recognition of the weak and oppressed categories that define them. Depicting the variegated opinions that dominate the decisive goals for men and women dependent upon the epistemes of knowledge within the smallest units available, opportunities are freshly generated in favour of separatist tendencies. The beginnings of antithetical moves indicative of discovering further tendencies towards otherness, are synonymous of the splits pinpointing bifurcations of modernity that address the pluralistic nodes of a proactive multiculturalist concept called femininity.

One pertinent question that is raised in forming the basis of my argument revolves around the pivotal point viz, South Asia. It is also an admitted truth that the pan-Indian poets perhaps would have sufficed in providing resources for study related to this dissertation. Seeking this opportunity, to explain my choice of this region, I, however, believe and argue that "South- Asian ness" as distinct from the more neatly defined "Indianness" relates to certain positional advantages and speaks for a more acutely developed cultural consciousness that may with reservations be deemed "subconscious". By making a deliberate move away from the more concentrated and fixed boundary of a nation (India, in this context) I make a further shift

away from the electoral democratic politics that the country has stood for. It has also prompted to locate the otherness of political systems alternating and deviating from democratic ideologies to staging of military coups and fundamentalism in opposition. India's peaceful and comparatively less complicated assimilation of secular aims or minorities in its all-encompassing spirit, does not necessarily hover over the neighbouring regions of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan or Nepal. It has also been my aim to disallow India's hegemonic pose that seems to be on the rise in lieu of the Rightist policies that contemporary nationhood seems to exemplify. South- Asia is a composite of heterogeneities that condition assortment of feelings in a pot pourri of rivalries counterbalancing each other and once again not indistinguishable from India. Yet the nature of heterogeneities, I contend, are not born of any constitutional clause resolved to seek unity in diversity. South-Asian panorama is a pastiche in the truest sense of the term, where the artwork needs to be determined by instincts instead of customs. Looking back to heterotopias that divided and altered the identities, this vast region is most consistent in rewarding itself with certain visions of solidarity in the presence of differing allegiances. Companionships that prompt in contemplating "otherness", locating of denial, dispossession, loss or expropriation among women who comply to similar conditions of deprivations in visible and invisible denominations of inequality or the more pertinent inequity floating amidst a pretentious and liberated society professing independence and virtue for its inmates.

In contemplating mobilities evolving out of the complex post-colonial predicament, and a cosmopolitan culture, South Asian communities, sometimes ravaged by internal wars and cross-border conflicts, urged on by linguistic and religious issues in the background, often exposed to crises embodying similar disadvantages grouped under economic recessions leading to poverty, starvation and hunger, or failures to control crime and offences, or lack of education of women and minorities, display signs of cracks and fractures

that habitually weaken its spirits. While such images of deprived and denigrated humanity are not few in number, plagued and enslaved pictures of womanhood clinging to ill-nourished children in their laps or by their sides, glowering eyes of innocence, semi-clad bodies, making an easy access to red light zones of the border towns of Nepal or Bangladesh or India, to trade with their bodies, feature in photographs and reports of journalists worldwide. The repercussions of selling their bodies are borne by them through the STDs or STIs acquired that are on most occasions left untreated. Banira Giri's (1946-2021) "Kathmandu" depicts the status of girls including minors, when, in the absence of other options, prostitution and flesh trade seem most viable and lucrative professions. India, statistics reveal, has a huge and growing demand for cross-border girls whose destiny remains largely concealed. The bodies of neglected, fragile and abused women roam the nocturnal spaces of Taslima Nasrin' s (b. 1962) towns in Bangladesh. Her poetry is a vivid rendering of hidden shocks and traumas, the undermined sections accept as part of an unwritten mandate. Urban dwellings and developed areas with better infrastructure comprising glamorous malls, airports, pubs, bars and latest entertainment features, call for further scope to explore the darker aspects of such trades. Mallika Sengupta (1960-2011) , the poet from Kolkata, arduously engaged her idiom with repeated pleas against exploitations of women, noting with caution other and more worse forms of oppression that awaited women. Domesticity and violence, as Sengupta observes, repudiates a simplistic interpretation of domination. In her exclusive proclamation, (the sociologist that she was), silences that are primarily unnoticed and ignored in tales of agony and deceit, masking urban sophisticated societies, where even among the educated milieu, reddened marks of brutality surfacing a plethora of savage aims, often concealed from the public eye, are punctuated with care. Unabashed and vociferous, Sengupta was among the rarest of those women who researched actively to improve the plights of women in the different strata of society.

The struggle to survive amidst the oddities of fundamentalist patriarchy did not determine the degrees to which tortures were to be endured and ignored, depending upon available conditions. Resistance implied loss of family, stability, sustenance and even the basic fulfilment of happiness that most marital and wedded women would expect to receive under normative circumstances. Calmed by a stoic logic that taught and tutored girls of different social standings to overlook the negatives and aim for resilience in the limited ambits of their lives, searching for and exposing voices of dissidence was rare and a major difficulty. Islamic orthodoxy, for instance, showcased by the bearded maulvis and esteemed religious preachers (who took to the stage with a sureness of ease that marked off their defiance and accustomed rejection of the miniscule attempts of their womenfolk to live a life dictated by individual choice) has made powerful progress to maintain its defective, myopic vision. Every possible, virulent, proactive stance to dismantle age-old dilapidated customs and build a wall of resistance with their ambitious purposes to dominate and in turn curb the freedom of those who despise it the most, has not met with ample aid from those who implement laws. Bangladesh and Pakistan, living in a non-secularist social structure (though Bangladesh calls itself a secular democracy), root their masculinist tendencies in favour of a less liberated and more confined, claustrophobic ambience, that shows faith in the extremist Talibanist ideologies to advance their purposes. Islamophobia, (as some western critics have recently labelled) posing prominently as one of the potential threats to humanity, (particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11), may appear judgemental to some. But it goes without saying that the totality of violences and bomb attacks, raids and terrorist activities originating from the Asian nation states, display a questionable coincidence in the interconnectedness with Islam and Jihad.

The vast majority of women authors and poets in Pakistan writing in English are, however, currently residents based in U.K., U.S. or Canada. This migratory shift may have been necessitated by their urge to opt for liberty and preference for anti-fundamentalist Islamist

protocols that disseminate the need to reject and negate without accounting for their choice of submission to unbiased ideology. Women who express through verse prefer the Urdu vernacular that is perhaps scheduled to interpret their thoughts with better accuracy. Though gazals do not fall within the purview of my research, yet it would be an error to undermine a genre that links the past to the present, lending a perfect combination of tradition and individual talent. Women in Pakistan are prominent forebearers of this tradition that seems to be translated along in new idioms for the new millennium. I also take this opportunity to mention that composition and singing by ladies, performances that are often associated with the tawaif cultures (prevalent within undivided India in pre-colonial days and even later), have not been regarded with significant literary attention due to the genre. But it is an undeniable truth that the creative instincts of women reach supreme heights in gazals that are formative, spontaneous and uncompromising in their qualitative aspects. Tawaifs of Lucknow, Hyderabad, Lahore or Calcutta invited and allured a worldwide audience in their days of glory, embellishing a cultural consciousness of elegance and charm.

Underlining the limitations that define the roles and positions of women that are however not solely determined by the education or formal degrees that they may have acquired; poets fervently disagree with the rigidities impinged upon the female members of their society. Pakistani women's poetry occupies a position of grave importance in the field of South-Asian feminist encounter with masculinist hegemony. Fahmida Riaz (1946-2018) whose "Chadar aur char diwari", composed in a syntax enamoured with direct avowal and accusation, is a blueprint designated to nominate male-oriented malpractices. Islamist hatred of liberty for women may not be the gift of the Holy Quran or the Hadith, but it certainly called for the complexities that a gendered masculinist order deliberately insisted upon its women to advance upon its own selfish creeds. Threatened and tormented, the active protesters suffer the risk of losing their bodies to indignant authority. By virtue of imagining a possession of the body,

recall the poets, their worlds turn upside down since support is hard to come by. Burdened and victimized in a system that prefers to see them occupants of comparatively blurred and peripheral spaces in a canvas where shades remain unsynchronised. “Hum gunehgar auratein” displays Kishawar Naheed’s (b. 1940) obsession against patriarchal heteronormative mechanism empowered by the dictum of the oppressing male. The poem is, significantly enough the title piece to the volume of poems that in their totality surface truth and reality in an unhindered commitment to a new order proposing motivation for the female sex to undo their bleak past.

By repudiating conventions that thwart women’s ambitions to survive without fetters, customized in Shame (or shamelessness), indicative of dignified exemplary attitudes in the heightened spirit of women’s very being, entitles her to the adoption of the mandatory “purdah” with its accompanying substitutes such as the veil, hijab, naquab in Islamist frames of reference or the “ghughat” and “ghomta” as per the Hinduised rituals and customs. I briefly introduce the notion of eastern variants of shame that are at cross-roads with the westernized guilt cultures or the Christianized versions of sin with its panoramic focus on shame. Classical attitudes to sin did not necessarily conform to the Biblical myths though overlapping gyres are equally unavoidable. Imtiaz Dharker’s (b.1954) *Purdah and other Poems* (1988) elucidates the purdah and its adoption in a serio-comic temperament, and decodes its singular perspectives. Steeped in mockery, the poems delve into suppressed truths that the purdah helped to unleash, the garment or fabric, as readers interpret, ceases to exist as a mere headgear or covering for the female bosom. The purdah, that prevents the women to be seen or gazed upon, is a device carefully construed to ensure the maintenance of the essentialist male-dominated norms of laaj/ lihaz/ Lajja/ sharm. Encouraged by the male dominance and allowing the same dominance to proliferate the mind and body of the woman, preparing further abjection to emanate for the women in general, are emergent issues in this discourse of

femininity casting shame. The purdah, in its various forms, notes Dharkar, is supposed to make great moves in favour of women. It is a ready reckoner for the ambivalences that are cast upon girls approving their undermined status but is juxtaposed to lend privacy to women who actually prefer to withdraw from male sneers. A well-formed veneer of shame that the purdah supposedly evinces, it transforms into a mechanism commanding individuality. In a similar vein, the title poem of the volume *Black Candle and Other Poems* (1991) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (b. 1956), the poet critiques the adoption of the veil. I draw upon the analogies and discuss Dharker and Divakaruni as South-Asian poets who develop almost indistinguishable nuances of the veil and the shame that it would exemplify for girls. Subtle in their portrayals of feminist attitudes, both poets operate along similar logic. Taslima Nasrin's magnum opus *Lajja* (1993), still a proscribed text in her own land, does not bespeak a theological issue for women alone. Based on the incidents of the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya (December 1992), that left the Islamic world aghast at the animosities displayed at the site of the Masjid, fanaticism of the Muslims was directed against the Hindus in Bangladesh. Houses were brazed, girls beaten and raped, men slaughtered and mob violence ensued with a sense of immediacy that represented the revenge motif in uninhibited claims to disprove their weakness and challenge the neighbouring country to consider otherwise. The conflicts in India in which Muslim minorities were affected, aggravated further shame for the neighbouring state, that had however germinated from the sacrifices of a large section of Indian soldiers whose contributions were sooner eradicated from memory. Jihad was the byword for success. and Nasrin's novel sparked off further trouble. Her humanitarian stance was reportedly anti-Islamist. She bore on to be labelled a "kafir", and expulsion was the last best thing that she found from her government. A novel of no great length, it was accused of questioning the veracity of the Islamic faith, and whether the Quran ever provokes such heinous offences. Taslima Nasrin was regularly involving in controversies. Her interviews caused further

repulsion in the masses of Bangladeshis. The poet's inability to surrender or succumb to threats were responsible to identify her an outcast. With a fatwa issued in her name to this day, reclaiming her lost land and the old familiar faces seems an impossible dream. Nasrin, before the publication of the novel, composed a poem with the similar intention of disclosing the atrocities committed against Hindu families in the name of justice for muslims and for yet another time the epicentre of violence in India located at Babri Masjid offered the nomenclature "Lajja".

Shame, in the South-Asian context operates on distinct threads of meaning in the poetic creed of women. Harbouring a sense of shame, the raped body of a victim is subject to shame for herself and her family or community of which she is a member. Moments of trial begin to accumulate as the newly wed dark bride must be made to hang her head in shame at the sight of her in-laws. Her body (literally the colour of her skin) bears the cause of shame and in the absence of other available options, remarks Divakaruni's persona, mandated compensations due to be paid by her parents to her marital home in disguised forms of dowry to assuredly buy her share of marital bliss. The ever-growing demands parallel regular tolerance of abuses, often leading to equally shameful incidents of death that society complacently calls "suicide". Bride-burning is not an uncommon or isolated incident in the subcontinent's social discourse. Brides failing attempts and risking chances of escapes subjected to unnamed forms of torture. Branded whores, poets note, the manner of imprisonment in particular "metacultures of shame" (to borrow a phrase from Wilce) and invite controversies. The note of discordance resonates in the extensive body of women's verse of South-Asia where women are provoked into silence and laws fail to be implemented in the absence of accurate evidence.

Ostracized entities whose methods of being expelled and exiled, vary with age and custom, across communities. The theoretical premises on exile are widespread in western cultures where the classical models segregate identities and treat displacement as

evidences of politically motivated attitudes. The Biblical myth of expulsion tends to render distinct views on the issue. Pressure groups, communities in possession of a cultural hegemony act as predators upon the individuals, groups, tribes or sections and allocate them an "other" space that may be symbolic of marginalization or a shielding off of the victims for betterment of a majority of humans. Hitler's gas chambers or the Cellular Jail of Port Blair speak volumes in exile cultures and need not be reiterated here. But the more contemporary incidents diagnose this crisis in terms of the refugees who are faced with infinite challenges to discover means and methods of their own safety.

I take this opportunity to examine a representative poem by Kabita Singha (1931-1999), whose suffers anonymity perhaps due to lack of consistent research on the subject of modern verse in Bengal. "Iswarke Eve" locates the deviations manipulated by Eve. Refuting the stance of an almighty Lord, who, is least benign and benevolent, Eve is foreshadowed as the very epitome of disobedience. Delineating her own boundaries, her body, she believes, has taught her the art to manufacture a host of those who resemble the Lord. Outlining the cause and condition that respond to her exilic state and fall from grace, Singha demands critical attention for her Eve. However, since the pivotal point of my argument revolves around women and their poetic sensibilities in South-Asia at large, I observe, in the poems of Jean Arasanayagam (1931-2019), a Dutch Burgher of Sri Lanka, married to an educated Tamil Brahmin, the conflicts that ensued from the acuteness of inner exile which mirror her existence. Arasanayagam, a Christian meat-eating entity, as her in-laws, (particularly her mother-in-law) branded her, failed to be graciously embraced or assimilated within the rigid, Brahmanical network of codes and strictures. The mandates of exclusivity that the Tamil Hindu traditions stood by, regarded the white lady most unsuited to the purpose of serving the household gods or cooking for the members of the house. Barred from performing or participating in any rites of purification, she notes, she occupies a literal no-man's land that holds her but fails to sustain

her. A close reading of some of her poems reveal the autobiographical details that she unhesitatingly reproduced. I add, that such poems testify to a woman's dilemma whose status of the poet/ novelist/teacher is nowhere appreciated or applauded. Painful memories of a marital home that abandoned her, leaving her unassimilated, caused a self-imposed isolation to be etched upon her body. Yet, ironically enough, the children she bears and mothers to perfection are not subject to similar positions of rejection. The misleading and confused ideologies of Brahmanical idealism are under severe criticism and appear not much indistinct in basic principle from Islamic fundamentalism. The psychological nuances of confinement that Sri Lankans experienced are observed by the poet on yet another plane of revelation. *Reddened Water Flows Clear* (1991), a signature volume of her poems, contains an elaborate introduction by Norman Simms who deliberates on the subtleties of the civil war that affected the history of the impeccable tear-drop emerald isle. Arasanayagam's poetic oeuvre alternates between the self and the other, where, in this instance, the latter may vary from being an oppressive terrorist, a Sinhalese fighter or an LTTE militant with a sole purpose to outwit the "Other". *Apocalypse 83* (1983), *Women all Women* (1999), refer to series of wars and ethnic conflicts, where women are the worse sufferers. She knew the refugee camps far better than many others, where she sought to hide and be safe with her family. She witnessed the mesh of traumatic patients in madhouses awaiting to be cured. The vast store of images may be substituted for any other post-partition refugee camp of Amritsar or Dhaka. Of all the poets that I discuss in my dissertation, Arasanayagam's personal identity appears most complex and demands a higher degree of contemplation. It is her European lineage and Christian background that account for the fissured ideology she represents. Enumerating examples of her Dutch forefathers (whose sturdy features she notes with pride from the frescoes and old paintings she discovers in the grand mansions of Sri Lanka) she exults and exhorts their attempts to arrive at this isle a few hundred years back. Her own body is a by-product of the assimilation and hybrid

mixtures of the west and the East, the coloniser and colonised. Fuelled by histories of discrimination, it is a well-established fact that Dutch Burghers failed to command positions of dignity in the European mainland in spite of accumulating riches. Arasanayagam's dilemma is manifold. She is a bait in her own system, a coloniser turning colonised, a delegate of the South-Asian family that conveniently locates her everywhere but actually provides her with none.

Nasrin's provocative pieces on shame confirmed her expulsion as already discussed above. But it would be erroneous to ignore her status of being a literal exile and knowing the true life of a fugitive escaping imprisonment. Sheltered in Kolkata, New Delhi and across other places in India by the government, following the fatwa, Taslima Nasrin was not treated with indignity. She travelled to other countries in the hope that she might be embraced by them as well. Following house arrests and being allowed very limited mobility, her stay in India alternated between fame and anonymity, owing to administrative protocols. *Bondini* (2007) is a collection of memoirs that lends new meaning to her exiled body especially in lieu of the fact that such confinements are to be borne in a land that professes socialism and sovereignty for its people. Autobiographical and confessional, the poems engage readers' attention for the truths that are upheld. Her manner of delivering certain emotions are furtive and put across in colloquial Bengali that makes perfect transliteration quite difficult. In the other collections of verse (*Nirbashito Bahire Ontore*, 1989 and *Nirbashito Narir Kabita*,1996), an existential crisis is at work for the feminist poet and author. How are women's bodies treated and accepted by the other? How do indignant male partners oppose and deflect the woman's aims? Nasrin remains heedless to all objections against her overt statements of female sexuality. The compendium of her autobiographies may serve as documents of her divided worlds. Livid and resolute to redress the wrongs, she is a case study for a feminine universe that the masculine looks upon with sheer mistrust.

In exile and shame the body endures pain, meets with violence and is operated by conditions that may be misogynist by nature. Abstract and concrete notions of shame are drawn across the figurative and literal landscape of the body and mind of women. Exiled, abandonments bordering a female body activates issues of chastity, purity, virginity and other labelled variants of feminine perfections in the regular inmates of a society. Physical ostracizations secure more offensive treatments from onlookers since they failed to comply and meet the given standards of social customs that highlight the need to adhere than depart from principles of morality. The third aspect that strikes me as integral to South-Asian women and the stiffness with which it is spoken of concerns disease, disability and decrepitude. The gradual, consistent weakening of the body's potentials, the lack of appropriate medications, inform the worse cases of mortality. Challenges to female corporeality in a non-phallogocentric space, problematises concerns in the fast-transforming social corpus. Poets of this region speak very little about the physical deformities or disabilities set in by diseases that instill suicidal tendencies, depressions and sabotage the minimum yearnings for survival. Diseases may affect the body and mind separately or simultaneously. The theoretical base on which I form my arguments are borrowed specifically from other cultures and since Mallika Sengupta is central to this chapter, I have relied on feminist discourses of the west where terminal illness and breast cancer are not limited by constraints. Mallika Sengupta's poems on cancer (*Mallika Sengupter Shreshtho Kabita*, 2003) divulge the real potentials of South-Asian feminist creativity. She was affected initially by cancer of her breast that spread to the other parts of her body in the last and final stages. The breast has for the female sex, a special and cherished position as a marker of beauty and sexuality. It has a strong maternal lineage that contributes to the omniscient and unanimously accepted vision of a perfect female body. South-Asians in all their conservatism, refuse to encourage discussions since the archetypal image of womanhood would consider it unapt. Sengupta's easy and free-flowing language closes against all orthodox parameters. An

Audre Lorde of South-Asian feminism, I attempt to note all the medical terminologies she employs in the rise and fall of cadences in her verse. Lines are replete with self-mockery as she refers to rapid hair fall caused as a result of chemotherapy, followed by radiation. It is her elegiac lament to her hair. Medicalizations, treatments, palliative cure were not enough to bring back her original energetic self to her family, friends and followers. The worms feed on her as they perhaps do to those bodies that are decomposed after death, hence, she knows and identifies the body as possessing an infected status, invested with carcinoma. Social mores of the Bengali culture with which Sengupta is aligned, do not tempt her to withdraw from the truth. Description of her maimed self does not deploy melodramatic diction. She proves her perfect modernist attitude in the long poem to Jibanananda, " jibs" (shortened from the original name as teenagers often do to address their friends or partners) , her " janeman" (love of her soul) adopting the persona of Banalata, the muse of the male poet who was every man's dream woman. Banalata's perfections are replaced by her fractured, broken self, prevaricating at intermittent intervals to make her utterances seem most justifiable and natural. Though no other formal or well-developed collection of verse on disease and disability have been known to exist in South-Asian contexts by women, the more recent pandemic created possibilities for resonances in verse from individuals across the internet. These occur as disjointed, structures and fail to conform to refined poetic standards.

The body in the South-Asian context has further space to explore other dominant traits. Though I do not explain the phenomenon of untouchability, the chief characteristic of Dalit literature, I would like to mention Meena Kandasamy (b.1984) as a powerful voice in women's poetry in the present era and discuss poems that fall within the domains of shame, exile, disability or violence against the body. She discloses the constraints and restrictions that the lowly born have to endure. Kamala Das (1934-2009), a poet who writes the foreword to Kandasamy's collection of poems *Touch* (2006) is no minor poet. Her poetic

vision marks the hall mark of feminist literature in the country. Das's Keralite background is infused with the need to change. Switching religions, she hopes to see herself in a different light. From Hinduism to Islam, her journey recalls immense realms of poetry that note her transformation to Kamala Suraiya. Candid, protesting, sensitive, may not be enough as adjectives to gauge her magnanimity. Projections of women's bodies and the sterility imposed upon their creative impulses, prompts her to voice concerns and raise issues that are closely interwoven with the women's movements in South-Asia. I shall try to discuss very briefly the contributions made by Ann Ranasinghe (1925-2016) a German, survivor of the Holocaust, writing in English (akin to her Dutch Burgher counterpart) and married to a Sri Lankan, whose musings on the body dismantles several conceptions connecting torment and pain caused by Nazism. I propose to refer to Kamala Wijeratne (b.1939), a Sri Lankan poet (who has no share of colonial or European history) provides her views on the ethnic violences and grossness of animosities wrung in from all directions on civilians and women in particular.

Sengupta' s trials of womanhood interrogate the attempts of an elitist society to curtail the extent to which women might strive to venture. Her victims stall the kitchen and the classroom and intersect at points of similarity. Re-reading women from the epics to the more recent political histories, Sengupta diagnoses the worn-out tendencies of generations to tirelessly enforce defeat on the women. A poet, novelist, theorist, Sengupta carries two-edged weapons that help to initiate further dialogue between the self and the imagined other.

I have read but not found ample resources to assist my research for the more inspiring haiku like lines of landays verse of Afghan women. Very little information was available for the Pashtun poems that disturb the masculine consciousness at great lengths. A majority of the South-Asian poets have composed immortal lines on love and sex and the responses of the female body caught in a web of expectations. I failed to accommodate this particular element since this constitutes specific elements of erotic verse. Suniti Namjoshi's

homoeroticism too is accordingly not studied at length. Maternity, an important aspect of the female body that may require a separate dissertation has been omitted deliberately. The maternal landscape of South-Asian feminism appeals to the poetic sensibilities on a much louder note. Hinduism, has unerringly cast the mother in the image of the Great Goddess, stirring emotions and sentiments related to maternity and its associated state, through the virtues of divinity. The Great Madonna of Christianity too is not neglected in the compositions of literary or cultural texts in this region. Recurrent motifs of bodies in their stages of pregnancy, lactation, surgery, etc dominate a whole new territory of medical humanities as do the instances of abortion, infant mortality, infanticide, female foeticide that wither possibilities for the vulnerable women of societies. Post-partum complications often times left undiagnosed, cause permanent disabilities (internally) to the mother. Poets have recorded the inequalities that are upset the joys of motherhood when a girl child is born to the family. The father who seems to lose out on the grounds of strength, vigour and sexuality, takes recourse to coercive measures against the wife or opts for traditional forms of cure for the inability to beget a son. Though medical science has other stories to tell, the body of the woman stands to bear abuse and accusations. Illegitimate children and their mothers are often cast against themes of prostitution that point in an oblique fashion to the more acceptable norms of mothering.

I would argue that perhaps a combination of other texts from visual culture would have enriched the project. Films, theatrical performances, web series, dance, choreographies, disseminate outstanding examples that contribute to a wider and more accessible understanding of the body of the female subject in South-Asia. Popular culture has an equal, and vivid manner of speaking for this theme to a bigger audience. My limitations prevented me from encompassing these topics in my dissertation. Since poetry is still quite less read and less appreciated, I purport to show my concern for this genre.

Bibliography

Accad, Evelyn. *The Wounded Breast: Intimate Journeys through Cancer*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2001.Print

Anantharam, Anita. Bodies that Remember: *Women's Indigenous Knowledge and Cosmopolitanism in South Asian Poetry*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2012. Print

Arasanayagam, Jean. *Reddened Water Flows Clear*. London and Boston: Forest Books, 1991. Print

Arasanayagam, Jean. *Women All Women*. Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 1999. Print

Arasanayagam, Jean. *Apocalypse 83*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Centre For Ethnic Studies, 1984. Print

Arasanayagam, Jean. *Kindura: Poems*. Colombo: T.B.S. Godamunne & Sons, 1973. Print

Bose, Mandakranta. *Women in the Hindu Tradition: Rules, Roles and Exceptions.* London, New York: Routledge, 2010. Print.

Cixous, Helen. *Stigmata*. London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2005. Print.

Dasgupta, Shamita Das. *Body Evidence Intimate Violence against South Asian Women in America.* New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007. Print

De Shazer, Mary K. *Fractured Borders. Reading Women's Cancer Literature.* United States: University of Michigan Press, 2005. Print

Dharker, Imtiaz. *Purdah and other Poems*. India: OUP, 1988. Print

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *Black Candle: Poems about Women from India, Pakistan, and Bangaladesh.* Corvallis, Oregon, USA : Calyx Books, 1991. Print

Foucault, Michel., and Jay Miskowiec. "Of Other Spaces". *Diacritics* . 16.1 (1986) : 22-27. JSTOR. Web. 18 August 2024

Hoeveler, Diane Long and Schuster, Donna Decker. "Introduction". *Women, Creativity, and the Female Body.* Ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Donna Decker Schuster. USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. ix-xxvi. Print

Hutt, Michael James (ed). Himalayan Voices-An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature. Berkeley, London, Oxford: University of California Press, 1991. Print

Irigaray luce. “This Sex Which is not One”. Trans. Claudia Reeder. 1977. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 363-369. Print

Jayawardena, Kumari., and Malathi de Alwis. *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women’s Sexuality in South Asia.* New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1996. Print

Jones, Ann Rosalind. “Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of l’Ecriture Feminine”. 1981. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory And Criticism.* Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 370-383. Print

Kaminsky, Amy K. *Reading the Body Politic: French Feminist Criticism and Latin American Women Writers.* Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print.

Katrak, Ketu H. *Politics of the Female Body*. *Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2006. Print

Klawiter, Maren. *The Biopolitics of Breast Cancer*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print.

Kosofsky, Eve Sedgwick. “Introduction” Between Men. 1985. *Feminisms : An Anthology of Literary Theory And Criticism*. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane price Herndl. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 507-529. Print

Menon, Nivedita. “Introduction.” *Seeing Like a Feminist*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2012. vii-xii. Print

Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil And The Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation Of Women's Rights In Islam.* Trans. Mary Jo Lakeland. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1991. Print

Naheed, Kishwar. “We Sinful Women”. Trans. Rukhsana Ahmad. *We Sinful Women*. Great Britain: The Women’s Press, 1991. Print .

Nasrin, Taslima. *Bondini*. Nirmal Sahityam: Kolkata, 2007. Print

Nasrin, Taslima. *Kabitasamagra*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2016. Print

Olsen, Redell. "Strategies of Critical practice: Recent Writing on Experimental and Innovative Poetry by Women; A Review Essay." *Signs* 33.2 (2008) : 371-387. JSTOR. Web. 25 April 2016

Rajan, Rajeswari Sundar. *Real and Imagined Women*. New York and London: Routledge, 1993. Print.

Said, Edward W. *Reflection on Exile and Other Essays*. London : Granta, 2012. Print

Saika, Dipli. "Writing From the Border, Doing Away With Margins: Carl Muller's Sri Lankan Burgher Narrative." *Embracing the Other: Addressing Xenophobia in the New Literatures in English ASNEL Papers 11*. Ed. Dunja M. Mohr, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2008. Print

Salgado, Minoli. *Writing Sri Lanka: Literature, resistance and the politics of place.* London, New York : Routledge, 2007. Print

Sanyal, Madhusree Sen. *Meyeder Kabita Panchash theke Nabboi*. Kolkata: Saptarshi Prakashan Publication, 2015. Print

Scott, Joan Wallach. "Introduction". *Feminism and History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1-17. 1996. Print

Sen, Mandakranta. "Hriday Abadhyay Meye" *Hriday Abadhyay Meye. Kabya Sangraha 1*. Kolkata : Saptarshi Prakashan Publication, 2014. 9-56. Print

Sengupta, Mallika. *Mallika Sengupter Shrestha Kabita*. Kolkata: Dey's Publishing, 2012. Print

Shamsie, Muneeza. (Ed). *A Dragonfly in the Sun: An Anthology of Pakistani Writing in English.* Karachi: OUP, 1998. Print

Wilce, James M. *Crying Shame Metaculture, Modernity, and the Exaggerated Death of Lament.* West Sussex, U.K. : Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Print

Wong, Mitali P., and M. Yousuf Saeed. *The Changing World of Contemporary South-Asian Poetry in English*. USA: Lexington Books, 2019. Print

Yaquin, Amina. "'*Badan Darida*' (The Body Torn): Gender and Sexuality In Pakistani Women's Poetry." *The Body and the Book: Writings on Poetry and Sexuality*. Ed. Glennis Byron and Andrew J. Sneddon. Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2008. Print

Shanta Dutta

Professor
Department of English
Presidency University
Kolkata